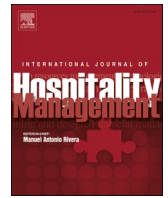ELSEVIER

Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Do mindfulness and perceived organizational support work? Fear of COVID-19 on restaurant frontline employees' job insecurity and emotional exhaustion

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A B S T R A C T

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak has impacted the restaurant industry tremendously. Building on the Conservation of Resources Theory, the current study investigates the relationships among U.S. restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19, job insecurity, and emotional exhaustion. The study also examines the moderating role of employee mindfulness and perceived organizational support. SPSS PROCESS macro was used for hypotheses testing. Results suggested that restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 was positively associated with both job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Fear of COVID-19 had an indirect effect on restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion via job insecurity. Employee mindfulness buffered the positive relationship between fear of COVID-19 and job insecurity. Perceived organizational support was found to intensify the positive relationship between job insecurity and frontline employees' emotional exhaustion. The research provided useful human resource management practices for U.S. restaurant businesses amid crises such as COVID-19.

1. Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a highly infectious disease that is thought to be transmitted mainly by person-to-person contact (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020a; World Health Organization [WHO], 2020a). With a high infection rate and relatively high mortality rate (Baud et al., 2020), WHO declared the COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020b). The United States is one of the most impacted countries by COVID-19 that forty-three states issued statewide public health orders (e.g., shelter-in-place, stay-at-home, etc.) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic from March 19 to early April (Ballotpedia, 2020). The economy was heavily disrupted, and unemployment reached 14.7 % in April 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020a), breaking the record set by the recession in January 2010 (10.6 %) (Kochhar, 2020).

Among all industry sectors, the restaurant industry got negatively impacted the most that four in ten restaurants were closed and over eight million restaurant employees were laid off or furloughed since the

very beginning of the outbreak (National Restaurant Association [NRA], 2020). This means two out of three restaurant employees have lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic (NRA, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak may further intensify restaurant frontline employees' stress and emotional exhaustion, which are already known to be higher than employees in other industry sectors due to the long working hours and frequent customer interactions (Choi et al., 2014; Han et al., 2016).

The laid off or furloughed experience during the COVID-19 shutdown, combined with the uncertain future impact of it on the industry, enhances the sense of job insecurity for people employed in the restaurant industry. Job insecurity is the individual's fear of job loss and becoming unemployed (De Witte, 1999). Previous studies identified job insecurity as a work stressor and linked it to several negative work consequences such as reduced employee psychological health, job satisfaction, commitment and performance (Ashford et al., 1989; Cheng and Chan, 2008; Darvishmotevali et al., 2017), and increased emotional exhaustion and turnover intention (Akgunduz and Eryilmaz, 2018; Schumacher et al., 2016).

People naturally worry about getting COVID-19 due to the high contagion potential and mortality (Ahorsu et al., 2020). Studies in other cultural contexts and industry sectors have shown that fear of COVID-19 was significantly associated with concerns of job instability and poor mental health including psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and low life satisfaction (Ahorsu et al., 2020; Sasaki et al., 2020; Satici et al., 2020; Soraci et al., 2020). Fear/worry of acquiring COVID-19 will be magnified in restaurants in particular – as restaurants are high-contact businesses (Choi et al., 2014) and may cause restaurant frontline employees to fear of contacting customers who are possibly infected.

It is not clear whether U.S. restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 could have an impact on their perception of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, existing literature suggests that social support such as perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived manager support help reduce hospitality frontline employees' emotional exhaustion (Karatepe, 2015; Karatepe and Kilic, 2015). Mainstream research also indicates that employee personal resources such as mindfulness help reduce job stress and emotional exhaustion (Hülsheger et al., 2013; Li et al., 2017). However, there is limited knowledge as to the potential role that POS and employee mindfulness play in alleviating restaurant frontline employees' job insecurity and emotional exhaustion during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the current study is set out to investigate whether restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 will have an impact on their perception of job insecurity, which may further influence their emotional exhaustion. In addition, the study will examine the moderating role of POS and employee mindfulness on these relationships. The findings of the current study will help better understand factors that influence restaurant frontline employees' emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide insights on HR management for restaurant operators during future potential crises.

2. Literature review

2.1. Fear of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion

COVID-19 was first appeared in the city of Wuhan on December 12, 2019, and soon after the initial outbreak it spread all over the world (Satici et al., 2020). The outbreak, along with the control measures implemented, may lead to states of fear and panic. Fear refers to the unpleasant emotional state which is caused by the perception of threat (De Hoog et al., 2008). Fear of COVID-19 may damage one's ability to think normally (Pakpour and Griffiths, 2020), and may lead to negative psychological and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Soraci et al., 2020), psychological distress and life dissatisfaction (Satici et al., 2020). For individuals who work in the frontline, research has shown that fear of COVID-19 may reduce frontline nurses' job satisfaction and lead to a higher level of psychological distress, and organizational and professional turnover intentions (Labrague and De los Santos, 2020). As the industry that has been hit the hardest by COVID-19, little is known whether fear of COVID-19 would have any negative impacts on restaurant frontline employees' psychological health.

Restaurant employees are regularly confronted with emotional happenstances and they are always expected to manage their emotions as part of their basic duties (Hülsheger et al., 2013), which may lead to burnout. According to Maslach (1982), burnout comprises three parts: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced perceptions of personal accomplishment. The current study emphasizes on the emotional exhaustion as it is the core feature of burnout (Schaufeli and Taris, 2005). Emotional exhaustion occurs when an individual experiences a feeling of fatigue, emotional and physical draining that result from extreme job or personal demands (Maslach and Leiter, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001). Emotional exhaustion is linked to a plethora of adverse work outcomes such as mental and physical illnesses (Tokunaga, 2011). Studies in the hospitality industry further indicated that

employee emotional exhaustion could result in reduced level of job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment, and an increased level of turnover intentions (e.g., Karatepe and Aleshinloye, 2009; Rathi and Lee, 2016).

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) may help understand the relationship between restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion. The basic notion of the COR theory suggests that individuals "strive to obtain, retain and protect that which they value'' (Hobfoll, 1998, p. 55) and minimize any threats of resource loss. People may develop emotional exhaustion when they (1) perceive threat of resource loss, (2) actually lose resources, and (3) not able to gain resources after investment of resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Resources refer to "objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects" (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). During the pandemic, restaurant frontline employees may need to invest both physical and psychological resources to deal with their fear of COVID-19, which will result in resource loss to handle stress at work. Previous studies found that resource loss can cause emotional exhaustion as the individual may perceive themselves no longer have sufficient resource to cope with the stress that they face (Hobfoll, 1989; Rathi and Lee, 2016). Hence, fear of COVID-19 may lead to restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. *Restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 is positively associated with their emotional exhaustion.*

2.2. The mediating role of job insecurity

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented human, economic, and health catastrophes. In a study conducted by Frone (2018), it was shown that during economic downturns, even employees who remain employed may experience job insecurity caused by reduction in salaries and working hours, poor physical and mental health, prolonged furloughs, and challenging circumstances. Job insecurity is known as the fear of job loss (Grunberg et al., 2006). There is a general consensus that job insecurity is a job stressor that may elicit psychological and physical health issues, negative job-related reactions and attitudes, depression and psychological distress, and function impairment (Leka and Jain, 2010; Probst, 2008; Thompson et al., 2017).

The psychological contract theory is frequently used to understand the potential causes of employees' job insecurity (Keim et al., 2014). A psychological contract defines the expectations of the employee-employer relationship beyond the formal contract (Smithson and Lewis, 2000) and can guarantee employees' fair wages and benefits and reduce job insecurity by providing employees a sense of control (Ashford et al., 1989; Keim et al., 2014). Factors that may threaten employees' sense of control would serve as antecedents of job insecurity. Those factors include individuals' personality characteristics such as an external locus of control, negative affectivity, and a low sense of coherence (Pienaar and De Witte, 2016; Sverke et al., 2004), and role ambiguity and role conflict (Ameen et al., 1995; Ashford et al., 1989). In addition, organizational factors such as low level of organizational communication and frequent organizational changes (Keim et al., 2014) were shown to be predictors of employees' job insecurity. Environmental factors such as the high national unemployment rate were also found to be associated with employees' job insecurity as the lack of control during times of uncertainty could lead to feelings of job insecurity (Debus et al., 2012; Keim et al., 2014). Moreover, a recent study of the impact of COVID-19 on employment found that 21.1 % of the participants expressed their fear of losing their job and 51.9 % believe that even future job postings will be adversely impacted (Baert et al., 2020).

Due to the quick transmission of COVID-19 and based on the recommendations by health organizations to cope with the pandemic, the U.S. government employed measures to alleviate the spread of the virus including closing non-essential establishments and enforcing the stay-at-

homes orders (Wilson et al., 2020). Such measures have resulted in over 41 million employees filling for unemployment, rose the U.S. unemployment by 1.4 million people in the week that COVID-19 was declared a pandemic (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020b), and led to a feeling of job insecurity (Spurk and Straub, 2020). In addition to the uncertain future economic condition, in pandemics, like COVID-19, people also experience concerns about their financial capacity. Employees may have fears of COVID-19 as those who contracts COVID-19 could not report to work and may potentially result in financial instability and job loss, which would further intensify their perception of job insecurity during crises. Hence, this study expects the following:

H2. *Restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 is positively associated with their job insecurity.*

As a job stressor, job insecurity was found to be negatively related to employee job performance, job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and turnover (Cheng and Chan, 2008; De Witte et al., 2016; Staufenbiel and König, 2010). According to the COR theory, individuals may develop emotional exhaustion when they perceive threat of resource loss and do not have enough resource gain (Hobfoll, 1989). As loss of employment can lead to negative consequences such as depression (Kessler et al., 1988), restaurant frontline employees' perception of job insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic may act as a potential threat to their resource loss and intensify their emotional exhaustion. Similarly, previous research reported that job insecurity could lead to resource loss, feeling of exhaustion, burnout and a reduced level of employee well-being (Ismail, 2015). Employees under threat of losing their job exhibit higher levels of negative emotions such as stress and exhaustion compared to their counterparts who do not experience the risk (Kerse et al., 2018; Smit et al., 2016). Piccoli and De Witte (2016) further confirmed the positive association between perception of job insecurity and employee emotional exhaustion.

In addition, frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 triggers the perception of job insecurity due to potential risk of contagion and uncertain future economic outlook that might lead to furlough or layoff. This may incite employees to invest extra effort at the workplace in an attempt to maintain their existing positions. Such further effort spent by employees may cause them to experience adverse psychological, behavioral, and emotional feelings which, as a result, will intensify their emotional exhaustion. Given the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion, it is safe to assume that this fear of COVID-19 has an indirect effect on frontline employees' emotional exhaustion via job insecurity. Consequently, we propose the following:

H3. *Job insecurity mediates the relationship between restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 and their emotional exhaustion.*

2.3. The moderating role of mindfulness

Mindfulness is defined as "a receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience" (Brown et al., 2007, p. 212). Researchers suggested that mindfulness could promote autonomous self-regulation and preserve energy (Brown and Ryan, 2003). A growing number of studies have revealed that mindfulness can be an effective tool to reduce stress for employees that interact with customers on a face-to-face basis (Hülsheger et al., 2013), and reduce anxiety (Sears and Kraus, 2009), depression (Foley et al., 2010), and worry (Delgado et al., 2010).

Fear of COVID-19 and job insecurity could add stress to employees (Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). In the basis of COR theory, it seems that in times of strain, mindfulness could be one of the influential ways to cope with stress because mindfulness enhances individuals' resiliency and helps individuals alleviate the negative effects of fear. When employees develop fear of COVID-19 and worry about the possibility of job loss, they become overwhelmed and consumed by those thoughts. Those who can stay in the present and experience the emotions as they occur are more capable to cope with the strain. When fear is approached and

treated mindfully, it becomes less formidable which helps people gain the flexibility to feel safe during stress. In addition, previous studies found that mindfulness can effectively reduce job uncertainty (Jacobs and Blustein, 2008) and alleviate worry (Delgado et al., 2010). Accordingly, we hypothesize that employee mindfulness plays a moderating role on the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and job insecurity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4. *Mindfulness moderates the positive relationship between fear of COVID-19 and restaurant frontline employees' job insecurity such that the relationship is weakened for employees with higher level of mindfulness than employees with lower level of mindfulness.*

Based on the COR theory, people strive to reserve their existing resources and acquire new resources which they value. According to Hobfoll et al. (2018), "resources include object resources (e.g., car, tools for work), condition resources (e.g., employment, tenure, seniority), personal resources (e.g., key skills and personal traits such as self-efficacy and optimism), and energy resources (e.g., credit, knowledge, money) (p. 105). Mindfulness is perceived as a personal resource that promotes psychological performance and decreases mental processes, where previous cognitive experiences constrain thinking (Carmody et al., 2009). Previous research showed that mindfulness helps people alleviate and absorb negative feelings and thoughts, discards ruinous behavior and enhances self-regulated behavior (Bajaj et al., 2016), helps them deal and handle thoughts and events the way they are without judging them critically, as well as buffering against negative mood (Hülsheger et al., 2013). Furthermore, researchers posited that mindfulness can reduce employee burnout and emotional exhaustion (Hülsheger et al., 2013; Li et al., 2017). Building on the COR theory, people tend to protect valued resources that help them achieve their goals. In this case, mindfulness can work as a personal resource that relieves fear and stress and is necessary for mitigating emotional exhaustion. More recently, Belen (2020) demonstrated that individuals' fear of COVID-19 is positively associated with anxiety and depression but negatively related to mindfulness. Thus, from the proposed theoretical groundwork, we posit that mindfulness will moderate the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and employee emotional exhaustion. Therefore, this study proposes the following:

H5. *Mindfulness moderates the positive relationship between fear of COVID-19 and restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion such that the relationship is weakened for employees with higher level of mindfulness than employees with lower level of mindfulness.*

2.4. The moderating role of perceived organizational support

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to the perception that employees form regarding the extent to which the employer values their contribution and concerns about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS was found to enhance employee's sense of obligation and leads them reciprocate by assisting the organization reaches its objectives (Gouldner, 1960). Previous research has shown that POS is associated with greater organization creativity, increased job satisfaction, better customer orientation, job performance, and reduced turnover intentions (Ibrahim et al., 2016; Pomirleanu and Mariadoss, 2015; Vatankhah et al., 2017).

Hobfoll et al. (2018) identifies support from organization as a job resource that may help employees foster personal resources such as intrinsic motivation, positive affectivity, and self-efficacy, which will in turn lead to positive psychological and organizational outcomes such as reduced emotional exhaustion (Karatepe, 2015; Michel et al., 2013). In addition, POS can reinforce employees' sense of control and alleviate their feeling of job insecurity (Bal et al., 2010; Bohle et al., 2018). As suggested by the COR theory, individuals strive to reserve their existing resources and acquire new resources to deal with stress. As a job resource, POS provides employees with emotional support, positive

self-esteem, approval, and affiliation and makes them feel respected, cared for and acknowledged (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Lee and Peccei, 2007), lead to reduced level of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Anomneze et al., 2016; Fiksenbaum et al., 2007). In line with the above discussions, it is logical to propose that POS will buffer the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Thus, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H6. *POS moderates the positive relationship between job insecurity and restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion such that the relationship is weakened for employees who perceive higher level of POS than employees who perceive lower levels of POS.*

Fig. 1 depicts the proposed research model.

3. Research methods

3.1. Sample and data collection

The study was conducted with U.S. restaurant frontline employees who are eighteen years of age or older. Restaurant frontline employees were employed since they tend to experience high levels of emotional exhaustion at work (Han et al., 2016) and face higher levels of risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. A self-report online survey developed on Qualtrics was distributed via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Previous study indicated that data collected through MTurk are as reliable as data collected through conventional techniques and having the advantage of recruiting a more demographically diverse pool of participants (Buhrmester et al., 2016).

The survey started with a few screening questions to confirm participants are currently working in the restaurant industry as frontline employees. Example questions include "Which of the following industries most closely matches the one in which you are currently employed?" and "Which of the following best describes your managerial level?" People who do not qualify the criteria were automatically taken to the end of the survey. Qualified participants were then instructed to think about their work experience at the current restaurant when filling out the survey. Several attention check questions (e.g., please select two to indicate you are reading thoroughly) were incorporated throughout the survey to ensure the quality of the data.

Data were collected in June 2020, with a target sample size of 250. The sample size was estimated using the ratio of sample size to free parameters, which should be between 5:1 and 10:1 (Bentler and Chou, 1987). With 33 free parameters to be estimated, a sample size between 165 and 330 would be adequate.

3.2. Measurement scales

The survey comprises two sections. Section one consists of questions related to fear of COVID-19, job insecurity, mindfulness, POS, and emotional exhaustion. Fear of COVID-19 was measured by a seven-item scale adopted from Ahorsu et al. (2020). Sample items include "I am most afraid of COVID-19". Job insecurity was measured using the scale developed by De Witte et al. (2000) with four items. An example item is "I am afraid that I may not be able to keep my job". Emotional

exhaustion was measured by a scale consisting of 9 items which is adapted from Maslach and Jackson (1981). Sample items include "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel used up at the end of the workday". POS is based on a scale consisting of 8 items from Eisenberger et al. (1986). Example questions include "My restaurant considers my goals and values". Employee mindfulness was measured with five items from Brown and Ryan (2003). Sample items include "It seems I am running on automatic, without much awareness of what I'm doing". Employee mindfulness was measured with a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (always) to 7 (never). All remaining scales were measured with a seven-point Likert scale with 1 for strongly disagree and 7 for strongly agree. A detailed list of measurement items can be found in Table 2.

Section two of the survey consists of demographic information such as gender, age, ethnicity, and educational level. Participants' job title, tenure in the current restaurant, and employment status during the COVID-19 pandemic were also collected.

4. Results

As a result, 308 responses were collected. Out of which, 65 failed the attention check questions, resulting in 243 usable responses. Normality, kurtosis, skewness, and outliers were checked and nothing unusual was found. The demographic characteristics of the restaurant frontline employees in this study are presented in Table 1.

4.1. Reliability and validity

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). The standardized factor loadings and fit statistics (Tables 2 and 3) demonstrate a good fit between the theoretical model and the data (χ^2 (475) = 889.36, $p <$ 0.01; χ^2/df = 1.87; comparative fit index (CFI) = .95; Tucker Lewis index

Table 1
Demographic Profile (N = 243).

|	n	%		n	%
Gender			**Age**		
Male	136	56.0	18−24	19	7.8
Female	107	44.0	25−34	132	54.3
Ethnicity			35−44	50	20.6
White	160	65.8	45−54	29	12.0
Black or African American	44	18.1	55 and over	13	5.3
Hispanic	16	6.6	**Employment Status**		
Asian	16	6.6	Part-time employee	53	21.8
American Indian or Alaska native	4	1.6	Full-time employee	190	78.2
Other	3	1.2	**Type of Restaurant**		
Education			Quick service restaurant	60	24.7
High school graduate	19	7.8	Fast casual dining	54	22.2
Some college	43	17.7	Casual dining	98	40.3
Associate degree	18	7.4	Fine dining	30	12.3
Bachelor's degree	131	53.9	Other	1	.4
Graduate degree	32	13.2	**Job Title**		
Household income			Server	121	49.8
Less than $20,000	22	9.1	Host/hostess	29	11.9
$20,000 to $39,999	73	30.0	Line cook/prep cook	26	10.7
$40,000 to $59,999	72	29.6	Cashier	35	14.4
$60,000 to $79,999	40	16.5	Bartender	13	5.3
$80,000 to $99,999	30	12.3	Busser	12	4.9
$100,000 and above	6	2.5	Dishwasher	5	2.1
Employment during COVID-19			Other	2	0.8
Furloughed	131	53.9	**Average Restaurant Tenure**	5 years 8 months	
Laid off	46	18.9	**Average Industry Tenure**	3 years 2 months	
Employed	66	27.2			
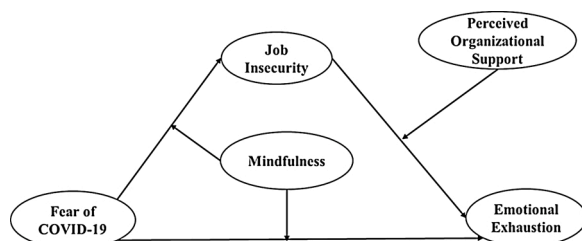
Fig. 1. Proposed Research Model.

(TLI) = .94; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .06).

Internal consistency of the construct was accessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). As shown in Tables 2 and 3, Cronbach's alpha values and CR values both ranged from 0.91 to 0.96, indicating good internal consistency. Convergent validity was further examined using factor loadings and each construct's t-value to see whether it is statistically significant (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Table 2 shows that most factor loadings are above .70 and all factor loadings are significant at .05 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Average variance extracted (AVE) value of each construct are between 0.62 to 0.82. Hence, convergent validity is achieved. Squared pair-wise correlations between constructs and the AVE value of each construct was compared to

examine discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 3 demonstrates that the square root of each construct's AVE value (ranging from 0.82 to 0.91) is higher than its correlations with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity (Table 4).

Moreover, Podsakoff and Organ's (1986) procedure was employed to examine common method bias since data for all constructs were collected from one single source. All factor items should produce a single factor if common method bias is an issue (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). The results indicated that the six-factor model (2 (475) = 889.36, $p < 0.01$; CFI=.95; RMSEA=.06; $\Delta\chi 2$ =2902.58, $p < 0.01$) was significantly better than the single-factor model (χ 2 (485) = 3791.94, $p < 0.01$; CFI=.59; RMSEA=.17). Hence, common method bias is not present in data.

4.2. Hypotheses testing

PROCESS macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2013) was performed to test the proposed hypotheses. Bootstrapping was carried out to test the indirect effect with a sample size of 2000 and a 95 percent confidence interval (Hayes, 2009). As suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008), the significance of the indirect effect is examined by whether the confidence intervals include zero. Age, type of restaurant, restaurant tenure, employment status, and employment during COVID-19 were controlled due to potential impact on job insecurity (Keim et al., 2014) and emotional exhaustion (Karatepe and Karatepe, 2009). Fear of COVID-19 was found to be significantly positively associated with job insecurity (.53, $p < .01$), which in turn was positively related to emotional exhaustion (.47, $p < .01$), supporting hypotheses 2. The direct effect from fear of COVID-19 on employee emotional exhaustion was significant (.24, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 1 was supported. The result further showed that the indirect effect of fear of COVID-19 on employee emotional exhaustion via job insecurity was significant (.25, CI [.16, .35]). Hence, job insecurity partially mediated the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and restaurant employees' emotional exhaustion, supporting hypothesis 3.

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were employed to test the moderation effects. Fear of COVID-19 (FC) and mindfulness were standardized before multiplication to create the interaction term (FC × mindfulness). Control variables were entered in Step 1. FC and mindfulness were entered in Step 2, and the interaction term (FC × mindfulness) in Step 3 to predict job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. According to Table 5, the interaction of fear of COVID-19 and mindfulness was significant for restaurant employees' job insecurity ($\beta = . -10$, $p < .05$). The interaction accounted for the significant incremental variance of job insecurity ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .05$). Table 5 shows the interaction of fear of COVID-19 and mindfulness was not significant for employees' emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .05$, $p > .05$), not supporting hypothesis 5.

Job insecurity scores were plotted at combination of the mean ±1 SD (high and low levels) for fear of COVID-19 and mindfulness to better understand the interaction effect. Fig. 2 demonstrates that the positive relationship between fear of COVID-19 and job insecurity was buffered for restaurant frontline employees with higher level of mindfulness (simple slope = .23, $p < .05$) than with lower level of mindfulness (simple slope = .33, $p < .01$), supporting hypothesis 4.

Following a similar procedure, hypotheses 6 was examined using hierarchical multiple regression. Job insecurity (JI) and POS were standardized before multiplication to create the interaction term (JI × POS). Control variables were entered in Step 1. JI and POS were entered in Step 2, and the interaction term (JI × POS) in Step 3 to predict restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion. Table 6 shows the interaction of job insecurity and POS was significant for employees' emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .06$, $p < .05$). The interaction accounted for the significant incremental variance of frontline employee emotional exhaustion ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .05$).

Emotional exhaustion scores were plotted at combination of the

Table 2
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results (N = 243).

	Factor Loadings	Composite Reliability
Fear of COVID-19		.92
I am most afraid of COVID-19.	.60	
It makes me uncomfortable to think about COVID-19.	.64	
My hands become clammy when I think about COVID-19.	.91	
I am afraid of losing my life because of COVID-19.	.75	
When watching news and stories about COVID-19 on social media, I become nervous or anxious.	.75	
I cannot sleep because I'm worrying about getting COVID-19.	.89	
My heart races or palpitates when I think about getting COVID -19.	.91	
Job Insecurity		.95
Chances are, I will soon lose my job.	.89	
I am afraid that I may not be able to keep my job.	.89	
I feel insecure about the future of my job.	.92	
I think I might lose my job in the near future.	.92	
Emotional Exhaustion		.96
I feel emotionally drained from my work	.90	
I feel used up at the end of the workday	.85	
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job	.87	
Working with people all day is really a strain for me	.84	
I feel burned out from my work	.92	
I feel frustrated by my job	.86	
I feel I am working too hard on my job	.72	
I feel like I am at the end of my rope	.86	
Working with people directly puts too much stress on me	.88	
Perceived Organizational Support		.95
My restaurant considers my goals and values	.85	
My restaurant really cares about my well-being	.86	
My restaurant shows a lot concern for me	.90	
My restaurant would forgive an honest mistake on my part	.65	
My restaurant cares about my opinion	.88	
My restaurant would never take advantage of me	.89	
Help is available from my restaurant when I have a problem	.78	
My restaurant is willing to help me when I need a special favor	.87	
Mindfulness		.91
It seems I am running on automatic, without much awareness of what I'm doing	.86	
I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there	.69	
I rush through activities without being really attentive to them	.87	
I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing	.88	
I find myself doing things without paying attention	.76	

$\chi^2(405)$ $\chi 2(475)$ = 889.36, $p < .001$; χ^2/df = 1.87; CFI: .95; TLI:.94; RMSEA: .06; SRMR: .06

Table 3
Mean, Standard Deviations, Reliability and Correlations Coefficients (N = 243).

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	AVE	The square root of AVE
1.Fear of COVID-19	1					.62	.79
2.Job insecurity	.52**	1				.82	.91
3.Emotional exhaustion	.52**	.64**	1			.74	.86
4.POS	.28**	.06	−.18**	1		.70	.84
5.Mindfulness	−.47**	−.57**	−.67**	.13*	1	.67	.82
Mean	4.17	3.92	4.29	4.96	4.02		
SD	1.72	1.80	1.67	1.41	1.68		
Cronbach's Alpha	.94	.95	.96	.95	.91		

$**p < .01$; $*p < .05$.

Table 4
Path Analysis Results (N = 243).

Path	Coefficients	p	95 % C.I.
Fear of COVID-19 → Job insecurity	.53	**	[.42, .64]
Fear of COVID-19 → Emotional exhaustion	.24	**	[.13, .35]
Job insecurity → Emotional exhaustion	.47	**	[.36, .57]
Fear of COVID-19 →Job insecurity → Emotional exhaustion	.25		[.16, .35]

mean ±1 SD (high and low levels) for job insecurity and POS. Fig. 3 shows that the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion was positive when POS is high (simple slop = .37, $p < .01$) and low (simple slop =.31, $p < .05$). Restaurant employees with higher level of POS tend to exhibit lower level of emotional exhaustion whether job insecurity level is low or high. However, the figure indicates that the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion is strengthened for restaurant frontline employees who perceive higher level of POS than lower level of POS. Therefore, hypothesis 6 was partially supported.

5. Discussion and implications

Fear of COVID-19 was positively related to restaurant frontline employees' job insecurity, which aligns with recent research finding that COVID-19 has induced employees' feeling of job insecurity that they may fear of losing their job, getting reduced wages, and not obtaining promotion as scheduled (Baert et al., 2020). This may be explained by the psychological contract theory that the psychological contract formed between employees and employers can provide employees with feelings of job security through a sense of control (Keim et al., 2014; Smithson
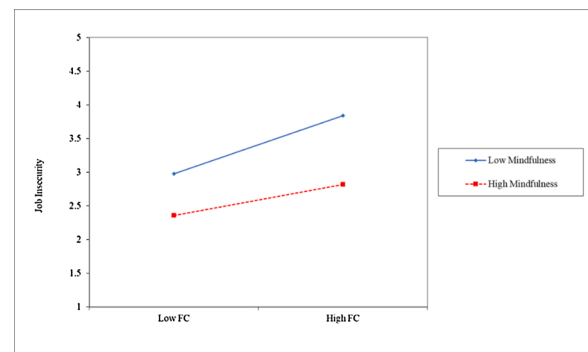

Fig. 2. Moderating Effect of Mindfulness on the Relationship between fear of COVID-19 and job insecurity.
*FC-fear of COVID-19.

Table 6
Moderation Test Results (N = 243).

Variables	Emotional Exhaustion		
Step 1			
Age	−.02	−.05	−.07
Type of restaurant	.07	.04	.06
Restaurant tenure	−.04	.005	.02
Employment status	.02	−.05	−.08
Employment during COVID-19	−.20**	−.05	−.07
Step 2			
JI		.32**	.31**
POS		−.48**	−.47**
Step 3			
JI × POS			.06*
ΔR²	.05*	.42**	.01*
F			100.06
Total R²			.48**

$**p < .01$, $* p <.05$.
JI- job insecurity; POS- perceived organizational support.

Table 5
Moderation Test Results (N = 243).

Variables	Job insecurity			Emotional exhaustion		
Step 1						
Age	.08	.10	.09	−.02	.005	.01
Type of restaurant	.08	.06	.06	.07	.07	.06
Restaurant tenure	−.07	−.06	−.06	−.04	−.02	−.02
Employment status	.09	.10	.10*	.02	.05	.05
Employment during COVID-19	−.21**	−.10*	−.10	−.20**	−.08	−.08
Step 2						
FC		.31**	.33**		.25**	.24**
Mindfulness		−.41**	−.41**		−.55**	−.55**
Step 3						
FC × Mindfulness			−.10*			.05
ΔR²	.07**	.37**	.01*	.05*	.47**	.002
F			85.80			118.73
Total R²			.45**			.52**

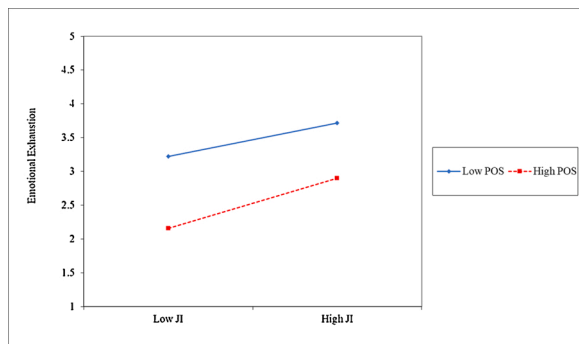$**p < .01$, $* p <.05$; FC-Fear of COVID-19.

Fig. 3. Moderating Effect of POS on the Relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion.

*JI- job insecurity; POS- perceived organizational support.

and Lewis, 2000) and that employees may perceive less control of their job during times of uncertainty (e.g., high national unemployment rate) and could lead to feelings of job insecurity (Debus et al., 2012; Keim et al., 2014). Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a high unemployment rate national wide and the complicated situation adds to the uncertainty of the future of the restaurant industry. Hence, fear of COVID-19 would result in an increased level of job insecurity.

Moreover, fear of COVID-19 has both a direct effect on restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion and an indirect effect via job insecurity. The direct relationship between fear of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion can be understood using the COR theory that individuals may develop emotional exhaustion when they experience actual resource loss that they may perceive themselves not having sufficient resources to cope with stress (Hobfoll, 1989; Rathi and Lee, 2016). It is natural for restaurant frontline employees to invest resources to handle their fear of COVID-19, which could lead to a reduced level of available resources to be used for coping with stress at work and may further cause emotional exhaustion. The indirect effect of fear of COVID-19 on emotional exhaustion via job insecurity can also be explained with the COR theory that individuals may develop emotional exhaustion when they perceive threat of resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Fear of COVID-19 may lead to concerns of uncertain economic condition caused by the pandemic and thoughts of job loss caused by potential contagion of the disease, which will result in a high level of perception of job insecurity. Job insecurity may be a threat for employees' resource loss and result in intensified emotional exhaustion, which echoes previous research finding that job insecurity has a positive association with employee emotional exhaustion (Piccoli and De Witte, 2017) and burnout (Ismail, 2015).

Employee mindfulness moderates the positive relationship between fear of COVID-19 and job insecurity that the relationship is buffered for restaurant frontline employees with higher level of mindfulness. This is because that mindfulness could promote autonomous self-regulation and preserves energy and can be used as an effective tool to manage stress (Brown and Ryan, 2003). Restaurant frontline employees with higher level of mindfulness can stay in the present and better cope with their fear of COVID-19. Being mindful may allow employees to perceive a reduced level of threat for resource loss and a higher level of job control, and thus a reduced level of job insecurity. This finding also echoes with previous studies that employee mindfulness can help reduce job uncertainty and worry (Delgado et al., 2010; Jacobs and Blustein, 2008). However, employee mindfulness does not play a moderating role on the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion. This might be because although mindfulness can help employees focus on the present and reduce their fear of COVID-19, the fear is only one of the causes of restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion during the pandemic. There might be other factors such as individual employee's personal characteristics (e.g., personality traits, resiliency, optimism) that also play an essential role on employees'

stress management and emotional exhaustion (e.g., O'Neill and Xiao, 2010) and may not be effectively handled or changed by being mindful.

In addition, POS moderates the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. The results indicate that frontline employees' emotional exhaustion is lower when they experience higher level of POS, which is consistent with previous findings that POS, as a job resource, can lead to a reduced level of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Fiksenbaum et al., 2007; Anomneze et al., 2016). However, the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion was strengthened for employees with higher level of POS than with lower level of POS. The result is different from other researchers' findings such as POS can significantly buffer the positive relationship between role conflict and emotional exhaustion (Jawahar et al., 2007) or strengthen the negative relationship between job crafting and hotel employees' emotional exhaustion (Cheng and O-Yang, 2018). This might be because restaurant frontline employees consider POS as a valuable resource during the COVID-19 pandemic and may feel more threatened by the possibility of losing this resource due to potential job loss in the future. The COR theory indicates that an individual may develop emotional exhaustion when they perceive threat of resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989), which could help explain the intensified relationship between job insecurity and restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion when POS is high. This suggests that job insecurity, as a job stressor, needs to be handled directly (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995) to help remove employees' concern of losing POS due to perception of job insecurity.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The study responds to the call for more study of COVID-19 pandemic impact on frontline workers (Sim, 2020) and was among the first to apply the COR theory to the restaurant industry to study frontline employees' emotional exhaustion under the context of a crisis. The study discovered that restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 can intensify their emotional exhaustion both directly and indirectly via perception of job insecurity, which adds to the current knowledge of the crisis impact on the restaurant industry and enriches the emotional exhaustion literature. In addition, the study applied the psychological contract theory and COR theory and highlighted the buffering role that employee mindfulness plays on the positive relationship between fear of COVID-19 and job insecurity, which expanded the understanding of the role of employee mindfulness during times of crisis. Moreover, the current study suggested that restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion was lower when POS is high vs low. However, different from previous beliefs that POS would alleviate the positive association between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, the current finding indicated that the positive relationship was strengthened when POS is high than when it is low. This adds to the knowledge of the role that POS plays on restaurant frontline employee emotional exhaustion during crises such as COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2. Practical implications

Restaurant managers and operators should implement practices to reduce frontline employees' fear during crises to relieve their job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. For the current COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants should follow the cleaning and sanitizing protocols strictly and make sure the dining and kitchen areas are cleaned and disinfected frequently by providing hand sanitizers both in the front and back of the house for employees and consumers alike. Menus, tables, chairs, door handles, POS systems, and other equipment or technology that are frequently used should also be sanitized regularly. Air purification systems can be installed to reduce the risk of viruses. Plexiglass shields can be added to customer-facing stations such as host stands and checkout counters. Technology such as unattended ordering kiosks and contactless payment can be used to minimize face-to-face contact between

employees and consumers. Secondly, restaurants should educate employees and provide information on what COVID-19 is and train them on how to protect themselves from COVID-19. A webinar/seminar can be organized to share information from CDC, WHO, and NRA which explain how COVID-19 spreads and how to best utilize preventive measures to minimize the risk of getting contagion. This would lower employees' fear of COVID-19 to a certain extent. Restaurants can further reinforce the importance of handwashing, social distancing, and wearing face coverings/masks at work. Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face coverings/masks and gloves can be provided to employees and instruct them on how to use the PPE correctly. Moreover, restaurants should keep update with the situation and follow the recommendation from CDC and other related authorities and share with employees on a daily basis either via a daily lineup or other restaurant internal channels. In the long run, restaurants should have a crisis management plan in place to be prepared for any future crises. An employee education program can be developed to allow timely dissemination of materials related to crises information and response strategies. Platforms (e.g., group text or restaurant scheduling software in-app chat function) that facilitate transparent and immediate communications with employees about the crises updates and organization actions should also be provided.

In addition, restaurants should pay special attention to frontline employees' job insecurity as it mediates the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion. For both the current COVID-19 pandemic and any future crises, restaurants can implement a customized flexible paid sick leave program and allow sick employees to stay home and rest without worrying about financial insecurity. Managers also need to be flexible with frontline employees' work schedule amid the pandemic and allow them to take leave for sickness or caring for sick family members. Employee benefits eligibility standards can be relaxed during the pandemic to help maintain employee benefits if possible. It is critical to be clear and transparent on the changes related to employee benefits and policies as soon as possible to keep them in the know and thus reduce their sense of job insecurity. In addition, restaurants may make cross-training as a regular practice post-pandemic to make sure employees are equipped with multiple skill sets. This would train employees into the restaurant's valuable assets and allow them to work at different positions when facing a crisis. The gained skill sets would further enhance employees' sense of control at work and help effectively reduce their job insecurity.

Moreover, training on mindfulness can be provided to help buffer the positive association between frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 and job insecurity. Workshops can be offered to introduce the concept of mindfulness to employees. Meditation, yoga, or mindfulness classes can be incorporated into employee wellness programs. Space to practice mindfulness at work should be provided such as in the employee break room or locker room. Restaurants can also consider subscribing mindfulness apps for employees to help them cope with fear or worry that are caused by a crisis. VR equipment can be provided in the employee break room to help them practice guided meditation or mindfulness exercises more effectively. Fun team activities such as a "21-day meditation/yoga/mindfulness challenge" can be organized to encourage employees to practice mindfulness both during and post crisis.

Although results indicate POS can strengthen the positive association between job insecurity and frontline employees' emotional exhaustion, frontline employees with higher level of POS do experience lower level of emotional exhaustion. Therefore, it is recommended that restaurants may implement supportive practices with caution in addition to implementing practices that are designed to lower employees' emotional exhaustion via a reduced level of job insecurity. The restaurant may maintain a supportive culture to keep employees' morale high and encourage them to face future challenges positively. For example, restaurants can provide more support to employees' well-being such as through free counseling sessions to help relieve employees' fear, job insecurity, and emotional exhaustion. Managers can also create

opportunities and channels for frontline employees to voice their fear, concerns/worries about job insecurity, stress, and negative emotions at work anonymously or openly and follow up with them to provide available support from the organization side. Lastly, restaurants can hang postage and signage regarding COVID-19 preventive measures and methods to cope with stress in the employee break room, locker room, and kitchen to show them care and support.

6. Limitation and future research

The study has the following limitations. First of all, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which is hard to decide the direction of the causal relationships. Moreover, data were collected from a single source using a self-report survey, social desirability bias may influence the results to a certain extent. Future study may employ a longitudinal approach collecting employee mindfulness data separately from all remaining variables. In addition, the limitation of MTurk platform such as lack of control of the respondents and rushed answers may be an issue. However, strategies were taken to ensure the quality of the data using multiple screening and attention check questions. Rushed answers were also removed to minimize the potential error. In addition, the study employed a sample of restaurant frontline employee in the U.S. Results from the current study should be generalized to other service sectors or cultural context carefully. A qualitative study can be conducted in the future to better understand the role of POS on the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion during crises such as COVID-19. Researchers may further investigate what type of support from the organization are perceived as effective in dealing with frontline employees' emotional exhaustion.

Future studies may examine the moderating effect of different aspects of mindfulness on the relationship between fear and job insecurity among hospitality frontline employees during a crisis. Researchers can investigate the role of restaurant employees' previous furloughed or laid off experience and type of restaurants (e.g., quick service restaurant vs fine dining restaurant) on the proposed relationships. The moderating role of generational cohorts may also worth studying since older employees are at a higher level of health risks than younger employees (CDC, 2020b). In addition, hotel frontline employees, especially the ones that work in housekeeping and front office, can be studied to help provide a more comprehensive understanding of COVID-19 impact on frontline employees in the hospitality industry.

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